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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BF](#) [PINR](#)  
SUBJECT: MAJOR SHAKEUP POSSIBLE AT OPPOSITION PARTY  
CONVENTION

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires, a.i. Zuniga-Brown for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) leadership and deputy positions will be challenged at next week's convention. If Perry Christie retains the leadership position it will likely cost the PLP the next election. Candidates for both leader and deputy also have backgrounds that are problematic and could cause further damage to an already negative public perception of the PLP. Regardless of what happens, there should be no long term ramifications for the U.S.-Bahamian relationship, given that both parties are supportive of U.S. policies. END SUMMARY.

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Public ready to throw out the old, party  
voters not so fast  
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2. (C) PLP insiders told PolOff that the outcome of the October 21-23 Convention could either unite or divide the party. Party stalwarts firmly support Christie while younger party members are eager for a change. There is also broad public support for Christie to step down and let the younger generation take up the reins. Christie appears determined to hold onto power despite challenges from attorney Paul Moss, Member of Parliament Fred Mitchell, and Senator Bernard Nottage.

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Christie stacks the deck  
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3. (C) PolOff contacts believe that Moss is being deliberately set up as an unwinnable candidate so that Christie can retain leadership. The National General Council of the PLP recently voted against resolutions aimed at protecting Christie from competition. Moss, 43 years of age, faces an uphill battle including having never held office and possible personal legal prosecution. He was recently sued over a USD 1.1 million escrow he administered. A U.S. firm is seeking judgment against him for failing to return the money in accordance with the agreed upon terms. Moss has also made statements that could have an effect on trade with the U.S. as he has indicated he favors protectionist policies.

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Stalwarts determine successors  
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4. (C) Despite public support for a change in leadership, it is the party stalwarts who will determine the ultimate successors of the party. These stalwarts overwhelmingly favor Christie. Voting at the convention is by secret ballot. Each constituency delegate and National General Council Member is entitled to one vote in addition to six votes from the Progressive Young Liberals. The candidate for party leader must obtain more than one half of the votes

cast. The candidate for deputy must obtain more votes than any other challenger.

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#### Christie threatens & scorched earth policy<sup>8</sup>

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¶15. (C) Although Christie warned of a & scorched earth policy<sup>8</sup> against those who dared to challenge him, Member of Parliament (MP) Fred Mitchell, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced his candidacy for the position on October 14. PLP members angrily denounced him for & daring to challenge Christie.<sup>8</sup> Mitchell is also publically viewed as an unviable candidate due to his alleged homosexual orientation and being unmarried.

¶16. (C) Senator The Honorable Dr. Bernard Nottage also announced he will run for leader on October 15. After losing the PLP leadership battle in 2000 he founded a third party, the Coalition for Democratic Reform. Nottage was favored to win the leadership position in 2000 until Sir Lynden Pindling, the former Prime Minister, announced he would support Perry Christie. Nottage rejoined the PLP in 2005. He is viewed as the only significant threat to Christie. He is well respected in the party and among the public at large.

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#### Three way race for Deputy

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¶17. (C) The Deputy position is sought by three PLP Members of Parliament: Obediah (Obie) Wilchcombe, Phillip (Brave) Davis and Jerome Fitzgerald. Both Christie and the current deputy

Christine Pratt are rumored to favor Davis. Davis is a criminal attorney who is best known for his vigorous defense of high-profile narcotics traffickers, including Samuel "Ninety" Knowles.

¶18. (U) The three contenders have garnered significant media attention in the last few months by criticizing high profile government projects such as the container port relocation, the cost of the Miss Universe Pageant, environmental issues at the Nassau airport and the National Training Program. Senator Fitzgerald, an attorney and business owner, has been one of the most outspoken critics. He was appointed Senator after the general election in 2007.

¶19. (C) Wilchcombe, former Minister of Tourism, could be tainted by his involvement in the recent extortion case surrounding the actor John Travolta. Wilchcombe testified last week that he had several conversations about the issue with the former Senator, and his law partner, Pleasant Bridgewater, one of the two accused of attempting to extort USD 25 million from the actor. Despite testimony indicating he had no knowledge of Bridgewater's alleged involvement in the plot, FBI sources indicate that tape recordings confirm his complicity in the scandal. Wilchcombe is also rumored to be homosexual.

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#### PLP continues to battle public image issues

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¶10. (C) The public perception of PLP corruption and indecisiveness cost them the 2007 election. An independent report commissioned by the PLP after the election loss noted that the number one reason that voters did not vote for the PLP was the perceived weak leadership of Christie. Although he was personally regarded as honest, he was strongly criticized for being unable to reign in his cabinet and swiftly deal with renegade members.

¶11. (C) Currently complicating this public perception is Christie's possible association with former PLP treasurer Sidney Cambridge, indicted in a money laundering scandal last month. Media reports claim the laundered money could have been used for the 2007 PLP election campaign. An anonymous

source told the media that Christie met privately with Cambridge and another member of the accused party both in Miami and at Christie,s home. The PLP issued a press statement in response to Cambridge,s resignation stating that his position as treasurer had nothing to do with the charges against him, which related to his capacity as an attorney. The release said that Cambridge &is entitled to the presumption of innocence.<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to distance himself from the issue, Christie said he could confirm that none of the funds raised for the 2007 election were received from those named in the indictment.

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Comment  
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¶12. (C) Christie is likely to retain leadership because the party stalwarts, and more importantly those who are internal voting members of the party, believe the PLP could not win another election without Christie. More interesting is the challenge for Deputy, where whoever wins will be seen as the next in line to be the leader after Christie. Davis is the strongest contender for the deputy position and has been executing an excellent public relations campaign. Further strengthening Davis, bid is Wilchcombe,s history of questionable associations and current involvement in the Travolta trial. Regardless of who wins the top two spots there will likely be little if any ramifications for the U.S.-GCOB relationship.

ZUNIGA-BROWN